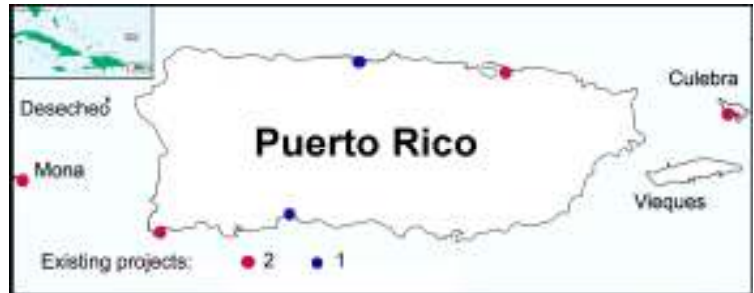


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

The Coastal Program In the Caribbean: *Puerto Rico* *Ridgetop ...*



...to Reef

General Description

The Coastal Program in the Caribbean (covering Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) recognized the need to balance residential, tourist, commercial, and industrial development with conservation of coastal habitats and species. Seasonally heavy rainfall, steep watersheds and migratory stream fauna link development and agricultural activities in the upper watersheds to the coast. The mission of the Coastal Program in the Caribbean is to work with our partners by providing assistance to restore and conserve the diverse coastal habitats and species.

Habitats of Special Concern and Threats

Puerto Rican coastal habitats include coral reefs, seagrass beds, mangrove forest, coastal lagoons, salt flats and ponds, freshwater swamps and marshes, and coastal upland moist and dry subtropical forest. Nineteen of the 26 animal and 8 of the 32 plant species listed as threatened or endangered in Puerto Rico are dependent upon coastal habitats, and an additional 10 plant species occasionally occur in coastal areas. These species are threatened directly by habitat changes due to human activities and competition or predation, particularly from feral domestic or introduced invasive exotic species. Upland forests, support a wide variety of migratory and resident birds, and native and endemic amphibians and reptiles. Upland forests have little official protection, increasing vulnerability to development, and subtropical dry forest has become rare worldwide. Extensive coastal plain freshwater marshes and swamps previously converted for agriculture are being developed for commercial or residential uses, and freshwater swamp forest has become particularly rare. River systems support migratory fish and invertebrates, nourish coastal wetlands, and impact coral reefs and seagrass beds when nutrient and sediment loads are high. Migratory native stream fish and shrimp are affected by water extraction, dam construction, and poorly designed bridges.

Conservation Strategies

Habitat restoration in Puerto Rico presents challenges in balancing conservation and development, requiring input from all stakeholders. With our partners, the Coastal Program is developing watershed units and habitat priorities to better focus program efforts. Our GIS system is under development to improve focus and track results. Projects benefiting multiple habitats (particularly coral reef) and species, will receive priority. The program will use National Wildlife Refuge Conservation Plans, Commonwealth Natural Reserves, and other identified conservation areas or watershed plans to further define priorities. Education and outreach materials are under development to better inform the public of the program.

Partners

Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DNER)
Puerto Rico Conservation Trust (PRCT, NGO)
Chelonia, Inc. (NGO)
Marine Environment Society (SAM, NGO)
Natural History Society of Puerto Rico (NHSPR, NGO)
National Parks of Puerto Rico
Municipality of Bayamón
Sea Grant of Puerto Rico (SG)
University of Puerto Rico (UPR)
San Juan Bay Estuary Program (SJBE, NGO-EPA sponsored)
Mayagüez Bay Watershed Program (MBWP, NGO-EPA sponsored)
Hydrology for the Environment, Life and Policy, Luquillo Mountains Watershed (HELP)



Program Accomplishments and Activities

As of January 2006, the Coastal Program in the Caribbean has:

Obligated funds for:

- Freshwater wetland restoration (4 ac, with NHSPR, NPPR, Mun. Bayamón)
- Mangrove forest and salt flat restoration, three sites (51 ac, with DNER)
- Invasive australian pine control in sea-turtle nesting habitat in Mona Island (20 ac, with Chelonia Inc. and DNER)
- Staghorn coral reef restoration (0.2 ac) in Culebra (SAM and UPR)
- Added elements to a large freshwater wetland restoration in Manatí (acres reported for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, with PRCT)
- Follow-up study for fish ladder placement in Aguada (UPR)

Participated in:

- Encounter with the Sea, outdoor classroom (for SG, NOAA)
- Three watershed programs (SJBE, MBWP, and HELP)
- Coral Restoration Grant Fund Review (for NFWF, NOAA)
- Coral Reef grant workshop (with NOAA, EPA, NRCS)

Future Needs

- Focus projects in specific geographic units defined by the strategic plan
- Expand and strengthen partnerships
- Include riparian buffer, in-stream habitat, and coastal forest restoration
- Assist watershed and conservation programs in planning and carrying out restoration projects
- Improve education and outreach materials for coastal habitat restoration

Contacts

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For additional Coastal Program information, please visit our web site at:

<http://www.fws.gov/coastal/CoastalProgram/>

